

are 9 out of 15 high-level positions in the Department of Justice vacant, including the position of Attorney General. It is clear that we need to get the nominee dealt with as soon as possible.

The average time for confirming an Attorney General is 3½ weeks, and I am hopeful we can use our time wisely to confirm Judge Mukasey within that period of time.

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, the other topic I wish to address is the subject of the week, the Defense authorization bill, and especially as it relates to the issue of the current ongoing military activity in Iraq. I wish to briefly respond to a couple of comments that have been said recently, particularly comments by General Petraeus and the remarks the President made to us last week.

It seems to me the President said something very important to all of America when he said the success of the surge in Iraq today offers us an opportunity to be united as we have not had for some time. There are people who want us to leave as soon as we can from Iraq. There are people who want us to stay and complete the mission. And what the President said was, regardless of which of these general positions you have supported, there is an opportunity now for us to get together because the reality is that as long as this mission does continue to succeed, we can withdraw more and more troops which, obviously, we would all wish to do. So I hope as time goes on and this surge continues to succeed, we will have the opportunity to continue to withdraw American troops.

I also wish to respond to a couple of comments made about the mission in Iraq because there has been some criticism of the mission and a suggestion that we should change the mission. I wish to make a couple of points.

First, one thing we do not want to do is change the mission by redefining that mission in the Senate based upon what kind of a mission could get 60 votes in the Senate as opposed to what kind of a mission makes sense militarily on the ground. Yet one of our colleagues has even made that point, saying that the mission should be defined to whatever will get 60 votes. That is the wrong thing to do.

The mission should be to secure Iraq, to have a stable country that can be on our side in the war against terror, that has a chance to do what the civilian government there needs to do, and to be secure enough to enable us to withdraw our troops so Iraqi troops can take over. That is the mission.

As the security is being established there, the mission can gradually evolve less to providing security, as that is turned over to Iraqi troops, and more to the continuation of the training of Iraqi troops and focusing on the mission of getting al-Qaida. That clearly is our No. 1 goal there.

But for those who say we can do that with a severely diminished number of troops, General Petraeus himself commented on that point and said you need the combination of troops that we have there today and in fairly large numbers to perform the counterterrorism mission; that it is not simply something you can say we are going to change the mission to one of counterterrorism only and expect you can perform that with just special operations troops.

As he said:

To do counterterrorism requires conventional as well as all types of special operations forces, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets. If the goal is to take away sanctuary from al-Qaeda, Gen. Petraeus said, "that is something that is not just done by counterterrorist forces per se but . . . by conventional forces as well."

The point is, those who talk about redefining the mission should be under no illusion that can be done with a different mix of forces than we have right now. It is one of the reasons we are being successful against al-Qaida because we do have the kind of full conventional forces at our disposal that enables us to succeed in that effort.

It will be very dangerous, indeed, for the Senate to define a different mission based on how many votes it could get in the Senate rather than what is necessary on the ground, or, No. 2, to restrict the kind of troops that are available to perform that mission to those that would not succeed. As General Petraeus has pointed out, we need the kind of troops we have there today in order to succeed in the mission we have there.

Finally, the whole question of whether we are going to be in Iraq for a long time, there are some who criticize the prospect of a relationship between the Iraqi Government and the United States Government, as the President discussed in his speech. But the reality is, as he pointed out, the Iraqi leaders have asked for that relationship, and it should be one that we actually support. We need to have a good, strong relationship with another country in the Middle East, a country that can be on our side in the war against the terrorists, that refuses to give sanctuary to the terrorists, and can be a buffer against a nuclear-armed Iran, a fastidious Syria, and others in the region, and whose interests are identical to ours.

This is one reason why it bothers me not in the least that Iraqi leaders would ask to us have an enduring, ongoing relation even after we have pulled out many of our troops, to the point that we may have troops in Iraq for a long time. We have had troops in Germany now for over 60 years, and we have had troops in Korea for over 50 years. There may be a point in having U.S. troops in the region and even in the country of Iraq.

Our hope—and I am sure this is shared by all of us on both sides of the aisle in this body—is that as the troop surge continues to succeed, we can

draw down the number of those troops to a point that it is not a strain on the U.S. military and the danger to the troops there is greatly diminished. Clearly, this is the way we seek to resolve our involvement in Iraq.

I hope the President's message, that this offers us an opportunity to be united rather than divided, in fact, comes to pass, because not only would that benefit the people of Iraq, it would help sustain our national security interests and help to bring our country together politically over this most difficult issue as well.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008—Resumed

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of H.R. 1585, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1585) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2008 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Nelson of Nebraska (for Levin) amendment No. 2011, in the nature of a substitute.

Levin amendment No. 2087 (to amendment No. 2011), to provide for a reduction and transition of United States forces in Iraq.

Reed amendment No. 2088 (to amendment No. 2087), to change the enactment date.

Dodd (for Levin) amendment No. 2274 (to the language proposed to be stricken by amendment No. 2011), to provide for a reduction and transition of United States forces in Iraq.

Levin amendment No. 2275 (to amendment No. 2274), to provide for a reduction and transition of United States forces in Iraq.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I am pleased the Senate today returns to the consideration of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2008. This bill contains important benefits for our men and women in uniform, including pay raises, targeted bonuses and special pays, and benefits. It also includes funding and authorities needed to provide our troops the equipment and support they will need.

Prompt Senate action on this bill will send an important message. Regardless of our position on the war in Iraq, we all support our men and women in uniform. The bill was approved by the Armed Services Committee on a unanimous 25-to-0 vote, and it is my hope it will receive a similarly strong endorsement from the full Senate.

We have a lot of hard work ahead of us before that can happen. As of today,